



Testimony Presented Before the Appropriations Committee

Submitted By:

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Public Hearing Date: February 22, 2017

**H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019**

My name is Jaleesa Freeman, and I want to give you a quick introduction of the youth here to testify, and also in the room. These young people are Youth Educator Interns at Solar Youth. Solar Youth is a New Haven based organization that works with up to 500 children per year.

Our mission is to empower youth to achieve lifelong success. We do this through long term supportive relationships in programs that incorporate environmental exploration, youth-led problem solving and mindfulness.

All of the youth you see in yellow shirts came here today, delaying their return home from a 3-day Leadership Retreat in New Hampshire. They are exhausted, but felt strongly about coming to speak with you about the importance of this program in their lives and their neighborhoods. We currently receive funding through the Judicial Department's Youth Prevention Initiative.

Respectfully,

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Testimony from Youth

February 22, 2017 to the CT State Appropriations Committee

LaShae Morrison, age 17. Years in Solar Youth: 8

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is LaShae Morrison. I'm 17 and I've been involved with Solar Youth for 8 years. I am here to comment on H.B. No. 7027.

Solar Youth is one of hundreds of high quality service providers at jeopardy due to the State Budget crisis. We are here today to urge your continued support, not just of Solar Youth but all the efficient, impactful organizations that create supports and opportunities for youth most at-risk of getting involved in behaviors that affect their lives, families, neighborhoods, and ultimately all people in the state due to the costs of addressing the problems.

With a small budget of \$700,000, Solar Youth is able to empower youth from my community to achieve lifelong success. Not only so we can be economically self-sufficient, but more importantly they teach the skills and motivations to contribute to our community, have healthy family and social relationships, and physical and mental health.

Last year, 66 of my peers and friends were able to have paid internships. For me, it is so important for these opportunities to be available. The intern program has molded me into a responsible and respectable young lady. It taught me the importance of responsibilities, and provided me with lifelong skills that I can use in my future. Without this program I am almost positive that most of my peers would have fallen victim to, unfortunately, the way society is set up in our communities. They would have been fighting, engaging in vandalism, dropping out of school, and drug activity. This is why your support is so important to me and my peers. Please, try your hardest to continue to fund programs like Solar Youth and maintain support for the Youth Prevention Initiative.

Karoz Toney, age 18. Years in Solar Youth: 3

My name is Karoz Toney. I'm 18 years-old and I've been an intern with Solar Youth for 3 years. This program means so much to me and has had such an impact on my life. Without Solar Youth I would be a completely different person.

I live in a public housing development in New Haven, where it's easy for youth to get involved in negative activities. I know where youth I work with can end up. Statistically they end up on the wrong path, as I have seen happen with many of my peers. Solar Youth is the pillar of our community and its survival is vital to the success of youth, not just in my neighborhood, but others too.

Solar Youth isn't just a program, a job, or a building; Solar Youth is a second home and a place of endless resources. No matter where you are in your life, you can count on Solar Youth to be there to help you. If they don't have the resources or capacity to help you, they point you in the right direction. Solar Youth has provided me with some amazing opportunities. The people and networking opportunities I have been set up with will help me shape my future.

Working with kids has been a great opportunity and is a major contributor to my success. My experience at Solar Youth has helped me to decide my major in college. Because of Solar Youth I know that I want to work with youth in the future. Next fall I will be entering my freshman year of college as an education major. Thank you for listening and I hope that you consider our request to continue funding for the Youth Prevention Initiative, and Solar Youth.



Testimony to CT State Appropriations Solar Youth, Inc.

February 22, 2017

Please support continued funding for Solar Youth!

Solar Youth's mission is to **empower young people** to **achieve lifelong success** through connection to the environment, their communities and each other.

In order to have transformational impact on the lives of the youth we serve – those living in the New Haven neighborhoods with the highest rates of poverty, crime and health disparities – Solar Youth has created a menu of programs called the **Cycle of Stewardship** that allow youth to progressively build on experiences over time, gaining **critical personal and social competencies** and **professional skills** and **serving as stewards to their communities and environment**.

SOLAR YOUTH PROGRAMS...

- Target youth with the fewest supports and resources to succeed
- Are offered year-round for youth from ages 4 to 18+
- Nurture personal and social competencies
- Provide rigorous professional training for teenagers
- Create the next generation of community and environmental stewards
- Give youth a boost in science class
- Are youth-driven
- **Are cost effective:** Solar Youth serves 450+ youth annually, all on an annual budget of \$700,000. In the coming year, with support from the State of Connecticut, Solar Youth expects to serve close to 600 youth as we expand programs to support 100% high school graduation and career/college planning.

Solar Youth saves Connecticut money:

- According to the recent report, "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth," each youth who is neither in school nor employed "imposes – on average and compared to other youth – **an immediate taxpayer burden of \$13,900 per year and an immediate social burden of \$37,450 per year** (2011 dollars). When these "opportunity youth" reach 25, "he or she will subsequently impose **a future lifetime taxpayer burden of \$170,740 and a social burden of \$529,030.**"
- According to the Connecticut After School Network, "**every dollar invested in after school programs will save taxpayers approximately \$3**, not including the savings from reduced crime" and "**\$1.7 to \$2.3 million is saved** by putting one high-risk youth on the right path."

Quick Fact for SY

Youth Reached/year:
>370

Teenagers hired/year:
>50

Yearly Budget: \$700,000

Major Program Elements:

Youth-led
Community Service
Action Projects

Exploration
of the urban and
natural environment

Training in
Nonviolent
Communication

Skills in
Mindfulness, conflict
resolution, & stress-
reduction

Employability skills for
teens as educators and
community
problem-solvers

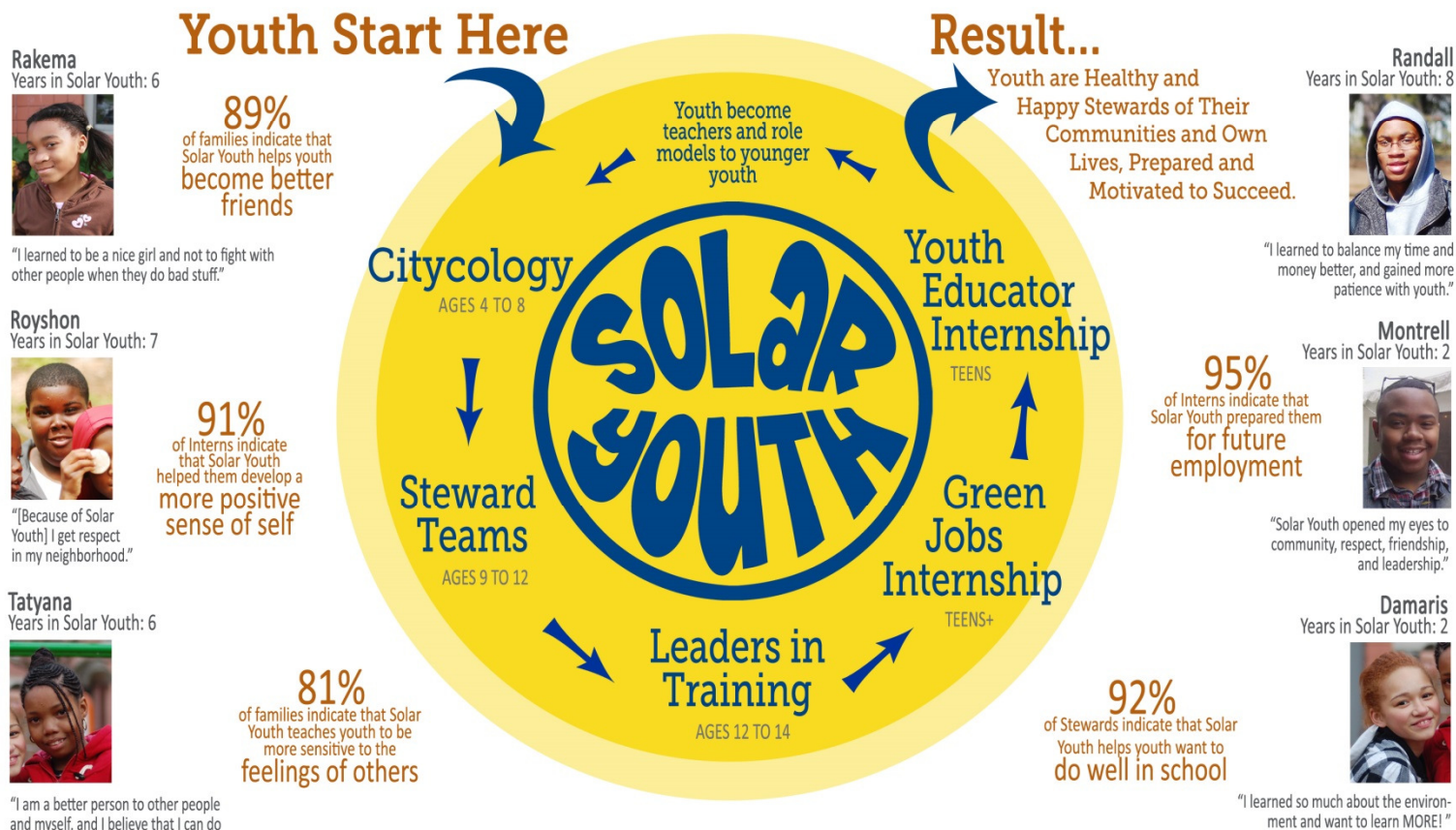
Please continue to support the Youth Service Prevention Initiative grants
via the State Judicial Department!

Solar Youth's Cycle of Stewardship

PROGRAMS: A young person's journey can start as early as age 4 and continue into adulthood. In the final phase, youth are seasoned leaders, serving as educators for younger children. The circle below shows the Cycle's menu of programs.

PRESENCE: Solar Youth nurtures young people through a consistent presence in their communities and lives. We build safe, consistent, loving relationships with youth throughout their childhood and adolescence.

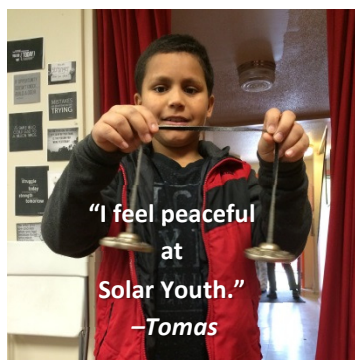
PARTNERS: Youth have needs beyond our expertise. Through partnerships, Solar Youth provides supports and opportunities that go beyond what we alone can offer. As a result, the system of support is more efficient and effective.



Solar Youth is a New Haven based youth development organization that empowers youth through environmental exploration, community service and leadership development. Data from fiscal year 2011-2012 feedback.

95-100% of Families agreed that because of Solar Youth...

- ...my child is motivated to do well in school
- ...my child is more sensitive to the feelings of others
- ...my child is actively engaged in learning
- ...my child likes to help others



"I have two grand-kids in Solar Youth. TJ has been in Solar Youth for four years now and he has overcome his shy-ness. He learned to help others more. He is an honor student with help from Solar Youth. Tyjon just joined. He is doing very well in Solar Youth."

-Elizabeth Yarbrough, Grandmother.

